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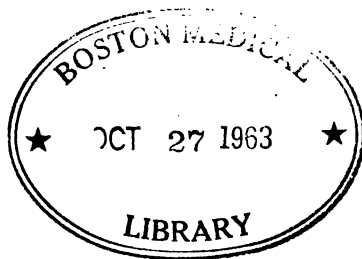
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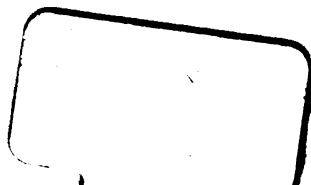


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Carl E. Ahlstrom,
110 Putnam Street.

Quincy, Mass.

April 15, 1917



STOP AND THINK

OR

REASONS FOR THE DECADENCE
OF ARISTOCRATS

^e
ALLARD MEMMINGER, M. D.



RICHARD G. BADGER

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my dear Mother who years ago as a Christian woman, passed from the little hamlet I write about into the great unknown beyond, I dedicate this small volume. A slight token of the affection, and appreciation of her and her teaching, by her son the author.



PREFACE

In writing this essay which the publishers have thought fit to bring out in book form, the author has not intended to enter upon condemnation other than that which he thinks a false conception of what is the best deserves.

He may therefore at times be misunderstood and considered a little harsh, unless one keeps ever in mind as to what the best consists in. It is true he firmly believes the word aristocrat, is applied in entirely too limited a sense, when it is considered as belonging only to those of so called noble origin, and noble not synonymous with virtue, still, he hopes and trusts the little volume may in the end do good, by pointing out the many dangers he thinks beset any other course in society, than that which has for its object, the true betterment of humanity by example and

precept, and not simply by name; and thus avoiding false pride (vanity) and egotism of birth or wealth, give place to a true concept of what the word Aristocrat stands for, when carefully analyzed and laid bare.

THE AUTHOR.

34 Montague street,
Charleston, South Carolina.
January 27th, 1913.

STOP AND THINK

*"Count that day lost whose low descending
sun, views from thy hand no worthy ac-
tion done."*

STOP AND THINK

OR

REASONS FOR THE DECADENCE OF ARISTOCRATS

*"Your ancient house no more! I cannot see;
the wondrous merits of a pedigree."*

These lines of the Roman poet and satirist juvenal, may seem strange and severe, unless one has watched in his every-day life, the ways of those juvenal is writing about; yes not only watched them, but the places of their making. Such has been the opportunity of the writer of this article, and to him has been accorded the occasion of noting with care and regret, the gradual decadence of the original settlers of a pretty little hamlet, snugly nestled among

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some of the foot-hills of the great Appalachian mountains, and in this essay he offers for consideration, a cause which he thinks in great measure may explain, not only their gradual decadence and lack of force, but set one to thinking, why it is that so many families with good antecedents do not keep going.

What is the matter, is it the environment, or are they individually the cause of their own ruin? It seems to the writer environment with those who are up, can play no part, and that it is their own fault, and this I take it to be the view of the great satirist, when in another line he says:

“Corvinus dwindled to a shapeless bust,
And high born Galba crumbling into dust.”

and puts but light store on birth by itself,

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keeping one on the upper rounds of the ladder, when he also writes :

“Fond man though all the heroes of your line
Bedeck your halls, and round your galleries
shine,

In proud display; yet take this truth from
me—

Virtue alone is true nobility.

O give me inborn worth! Dare to be just,
Firm to your word, and faithful to your
trust;

These praises hear, at least deserve to hear,
I grant your claim and recognize the peer.”

A little spot then on this great earth, was
cleared, chosen and founded originally by a
people of culture and refinement, who with
them brought that old time hospitable civiliza-

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tion, which is so pleasant always to come in contact, but which in these times is giving place to an ostentatious hospitality mixed with show, and free almost entirely of deep and true heart feeling.

This place too like other small places, had from its view men and women of mark, but it was not so much from this standpoint, as from one of lineal descendants that she prided herself, a very unsafe guide to rely entirely on, since many a time even here it is but the distance that lends enchantment to the view.

It may be said a few came from, as far as known, distinguished parentage, of their descendants, however, some from inanity or otherwise, have long since sunk below the horizon of observation, and therefore those who hail from such, should look to themselves to save them from utter oblivion, or worse

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still a further decadence and degeneracy in the stock.

The great historian Edward Gibbon has well said, that life is not stationary; to use his own words "All that is human must retrograde if it do not advance." Such most assuredly we add will be the case, if a people instead of emulating by good deeds the worthy acts of their Forefathers, content themselves by referring to them, and at the same time making light of those who without such ancestors, are doing like deeds right around them, and consequently are just as worthy of respect and high position.

Society based upon this false idea, will as Gibbon well says retrograde, since ideals of action can only be kept alive by like actions, which represent the body the substance; whereas speaking of them, confers the honor

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on those who did them, and in no way should be the mark of distinction of such, since they simply live on them and thereby do not discharge a debt, but rather incur one, or as Edward Young puts it:

“They that on glorious ancestors enlarge,
Produce their debt instead of their discharge.”

A trade mark it is true sells the flour, but if the flour on analysis be found impure, the trade mark is ruined and the flour thrown into the dump. So we say should it be with names. A name is the trade mark, the introduction, which when upheld should entitle the holder thereof to a good social standing, but like the flour trade mark, if found false and impure, should be thrown into the Society

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dump and lost sight of. By this method and this alone, can a true, just and logical social standing be maintained, for by the other the best is merely in name and not in reality.

When then we apply our measuring rule to the little hamlet and its people I am writing about, we see at a glance it has nothing to spare. Reared upon idleness in the lap of luxury, and with teachers who dominated society with their short sighted policy of lineage of the past uncoupled from deeds of the present, we have a race of small men and women which would not be bad were it all, but together with this, we have naturally following from this narrowness of view, want of humility and love for humanity, yes just those attributes which truly make the great and good man, he to whom you may with pride look to as an ancestor, we pause to "Stop and Think."

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Thus then after a little we see such narrow-minded people degenerating into all kinds and manners of beings, living upon others, and blaming the past or fate for their failure in life.

No country goes to pieces all at once, it is piecemeal, and so from our observations has it been with this little place. Some have already fallen from view, but still they sing the same old song, although completely routed from every avenue of note.

Those who seem more secure, having in some instances temporarily saved themselves by marital alliances with trades-people and otherwise, I see doomed to the same retrogression, for in many instances, I could mention, this dominating influence of so-called name, is working its sure but ugly work, eliminating in some instances the proper respect for one to

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whom the children owe everything.

Herbert Spencer tells us that manners originate by imitation of the behavior pursued towards the great, and fashion by imitation of the behavior of the great. In other words the one has its derivation in the titles, phrases and salutes used to those in power, whereas the other is derived from the habits and appearances exhibited by those of influence and power. By and by says Spencer, Fashion corrupting like other forms of rule, almost wholly ceases to be an imitation of the best, and becomes an imitation of quite other than the best.

As those who take orders are not those having a special fitness for the priestly office, but those who see their way to a living by it; as legislators and public functionaries do not become such by virtue of their political insight

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and power to rule, but by virtue of birth, acreage and class influence.

So the self-elected clique who set the fashion, gain the prerogative not by their force of nature, their intellect, their higher worth or better taste, but gain it solely by their unchecked assumption. Among the initiated are to be found neither the noblest in rank, the chief in power, the best cultured, the most refined, nor those of greatest genius, wit or beauty. And their reunions, so far from being superior to others, are noted for their inanity. Yet by the example of these sham great, and not by that of the truly great does society at large now regulate its goings and comings, its hours, its dress, its small usages.

Most assuredly all of this is well said, and we may further add, this Idolatry of class eventuates finally into a clique of weaklings,

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who by an understood, but not expressed agreement, are ready at all times to uphold each other. Consequently by a united effort they are able to hold up and support those who have long since forfeited the high family name from which they came.

Let then those who have by good fortune risen to the position of high social standing, show the grandeur of their caste by associating on a free and equal footing with those of the same tastes, but with inferior environment and former employment, for they should not keep aloof and look down upon those of less good fortune, as snobs invariably do, but by associating, extend their sphere of usefulness, which in the end raises the general plane of one's place of living.

Lord Byron in his day wrote :

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"Society is now one polished horde, formed of two mighty tribes the Bores and Bored."

So may we say it still is, with now, however, a little of the polish rubbed off. That they are bored by their objectless lives I think is shown by the number of hours spent in frivolous amusement.

Bridge whist and other harmless amusements are good when taken in moderation; but to spend one's life in stimulating self-indulgence and pleasure, talking about and criticising your neighbors, seems to us to lead in the end to ennui, unhappiness and in many instances indulgences of a far more grave and ruinous kind.

To hold then that such a class represents the best society seems again to us to grant that life is a failure, living for others a mistake,

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doing good deeds whereby we may be remembered foolish, for after all in inheriting a name we need none of them! "Stop and Think."

Well then, this little hamlet as we have said, situated among the foot-hills of the great Appalachian range was distant but three miles from a trades town, therefore with these people little if any of a social interchange of courtesies on the same plane was exchanged, and therefrom the two peoples kept apart in heart and feeling. Just here then let us stop and consider what an anomalous state of things seems to govern society in her interchange of visits on the same plane of equality one with another. It is not governed by what we might call congeniality of tastes, which would be quite understandable, but is ruled although in a Christian land, by the false and

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unchristian standard of non-equal association with a man or woman who worked at some menial occupation, no matter how fit now to associate with the best.

That the absolutely worldly can do this we understand, but that Christians and members of the church should enlist under such a standard, means they don't care about the precepts of their standard bearer, and have forgotten who his apostles were; Peter the fisherman, Matthew the tax gatherer, and the rest of them of humble birth.

So, too, it has often been a matter of speculation to the writer why it was the Master surrounded himself with disciples of humble birth regardless of their occupation.

Did he consider them more tractable than those of higher station in life, or was it that he thought he could make of them higher

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types?

On careful analysis of his sayings, his doings, and manner of advent into this world, it would seem to us that he must have thought both propositions correct, for those of humble birth had no worldly traditions and pedigree to look back to and obfuscate as it often does, the real position of man when he is born naked into this world. So at once he saw that with no such stumbling block in the way, man's progress upward could be assured with the proper guide, and a stage of evolution we are just beginning to apprehend attained.

Therefore he selected humble men, not men with set society views, as was the case with the higher, I would rather call it more worldly powerful class, he seems always to have been at variance with, no doubt for the reason that they then as now, must militate against the

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uplift of humanity, in making true feeling and right action subservient to fashionable society's idea of proper form, in most instances nothing more or less than the arbitrary dictum of the rich, and so society still holding to traditions of birth as being of more consequence for a social standing, than virtue in its widest sense, would doubtless to-day, although professing homage for these Apostles of the Master, keep them out or else if taken in, sneer at their lowly origin.

In spite of this hypocrisy, however, and therefore readily seen by the sincere as wholly a false foundation for any true religion no matter what its form, to rest upon, true religion will keep ever ahead even if it cannot as yet conquer this vanity of the world's social orders, which produces as far as we have been able to judge, a chaotic state of what is

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commonly known as the best society.

So as we see it, this total disregard by the Master of lowliness of occupation of his humble associates, points to his entire disregard of such things, and the senseless vanity of our feeling against such, or against the individual who is ascending in the proper manner the ladder of social life, commonly called society.

It is therefore intended, we think, to lead true people to learn that caste or birth is the accident to man, which may help or be injurious, but virtue, right doing and right feeling in their widest sense, the culmination of a pure and true life, the acceptance of God's gentleman; thoroughly and successfully embodied in the person and life of Christ.

It teaches then the poor that their cradle of origin can never be more humble than the Master's, and does not debar them from ris-

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ing, evolving higher in the scale of the best, if they follow him. It teaches, too, the worldly well born, and those in the cradle of the rich, that neither their origin nor their riches can keep them truly the best, if they do not follow the same rule.

Is this then the standard your worldly accidental social birth has led you up to? Stop and Think.

But some one will say your theory may be right, but it is impossible in practice, you cannot mix oil and water; how evidently false is such reasoning, it is not a matter of mixing orders of different weights, but simply the bringing together of merit with character, things of the same value whether found in the professions, trades or other places. It is this principle I take it which gives *true* Christianity such firm footing

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in the world, and which withstands all the onslaughts made against it.

Why then should not society adopt this basic element of strength, and be superior just in proportion as she approximately contains and carries out the fundamental principles laid down by the great teacher in the sermon on the Mount.

By so doing she would have an invulnerable foundation, and be so far above those who look upon birth, wealth and accident as their standard, that to be in society would be the synonym of a Christian and the guarantee of a true gentleman and lady.

Now again one will say you cannot mix religion and society together any more than you can church and state, they must be kept separate. Such I know is the case, and therefore the religion of those in society and the stand-

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ard they set is not of the best.

True religion as I take it is not creed, nor should true society be the same, as we evolve we note creed giving place to a more wholesome and comprehensive view of religious thought, that each is each others brother, (taught also by Budha who denounced Caste) and from such breadth of view look upon widespread calamity following Pestilence, famine, earthquake and cyclone, not as the special interposition of a vengeance seeking Providence, but as due in most instances to man's ignorance of nature and her inexorable laws, and see in it the opportunity of man's going forth in aid to man, of doing good.

Just so we say society should be, she should no longer be the creed of caste, the insignia of accident, but should doff her narrow and primitive garb of primitive man, who looked upon

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his chief, his king and princes all as sprung from gods, whereas we know they are not, and though probably an idea doing good at first, is to-day a missfit in our stage of evolution.

Thus while they would like to keep down forever these true patricians of the soil, they exchange freely on an equal plane all convivialities and social courtesies with those who are rich, no matter what their manners nor their character, and from this soil of disintegration is born the uneducated Plutocrat and the Vulgar rich, who in turn, become more overbearing, insolent and a menace to all that is true and good in society.

Their desire to associate with those who call themselves bourbons, and be one of them, with airs at times highly ridiculous, makes even a more undesirable character in the end,

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for they are toadies even with their money, sycophantish servile to some, insolent to others, and arrogant by their wealth, a position which when that which kept them up, their money, is gone, shows them entirely unentitled to.

Now I do not mean to imply that all the rich are such, far from it, they as a class are as the educated, the bourgeois and the humble, some good some bad; find first then in any of them the individual who is educated of good moral character, refined sentiments, tastes and instincts, and you have a person fit to associate with any one and the equal, socially, of all. Do not mind then the occupation or class from which they come, but take them under the conditions I have stated as they are.

I feel my readers will now judge me a leveller, a Socialist of a severe type, a teach-

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er of wrong ideas. No! none of these, neither Socialist, as commonly understood, nor leveller and teacher of wrong ideas, but quite the opposite; to elevate mankind, an equalizer of false class distinction, making possible for all time, a social order dependent upon individual merit.

But do I not hear this is just what society aims at in her discrimination of meritorious persons, it is just that which makes them rise. This may at first seem good and quite an answer to my restrictions, but is not true, for every one knows who is in society, that very frequently an ordinary uncultured clerk, behind a counter in a large store or business office, but is of lineage, can get into the inner circle, when his superior may be owner of the store or business, of more culture but without lineage cannot.

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What is society then? A very hard thing to define; what it is, and what it the best, should be, are quite different things however.

If defined as orders for association on like planes with like tastes and high ideals, I think any one who has ever engaged in it will say it falls far short of its mark.

If, however, defined as the starting point of a class who think they can go back to ancestors who did no menial work of any kind, but from their inheritance of blood and money did govern, we have the fallacy and stupidity of the position. Those who gave the money gave the blood, and were those who worked before, and for them; if then they call themselves well descended, surely those who now work are equally as good as they their ancestors, since idleness ne'er gave a penny.

But one again will say, no one in menial

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work will ever be refined, and therefore cannot be considered in society. This assumption like many others of this self-elected clique is wholly and entirely untrue; how many have I not seen who with poor, respectable and humble parentage, were not only fit to be among the best, but were far too honest, refined and pure in mind to be thrown among the gay and artful smart set, who having other things in view, kept them out because of their obscure ancestors, truly a friend in disguise for their good, but not the best for society.

No real true rule then governs this whimsical heartless and unbalanced creature of man, for like himself it is subject to many caprices. So we often see the same name, spelled in exactly the same way, and which has forged to the front on account of its own true weight, belittled by those in society with

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the same name who have done nothing, but can trace back to some ancestor who did something, and therefrom try and overslaugh this relationship, because they know it was brought about by marrying one of a different class, and which though they call a *mésalliance*, God the Creator of all does not. Visits of call, too, in most instances, are simply conventional things, merely the leaving of a card, no feeling no desire to see the people and know them, but an empty evidence that those upon whom they are tendered have been recognized.

I ask then are we right in acquiescing to this dictum, and does not the acceptance of this insincere and hollow kind of recognition help to form a character that is neither true, beautiful nor good, indeed the character of a hypocrite? Stop and Think.

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Howbeit as time has swept onward, the energy of the trades-town, has swept over the inertia of the inert aristocratic place, and to-day the one is a thriving town with its bustle and activity, and the other a quiet hamlet with most of the old original settlers and their descendants living under very different circumstances, and in some cases very different habitations from what they formerly lived in. That this change is due in part to the reasons I have assigned, I think very probable, and if aristocratic birth brings with it, also what Fronto the educator of Marcus Aurelius tells us, that he "Fronto taught me not to expect natural affection from the highly born," we have another good reason for this disintegration and crumbling away of the first families.

This old place then with its distaste for the trades and trades-people, strange to say, is fast

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becoming such a place itself, for boarding houses, shops and things not thought of in the olden time are now under way, and run, too, in some instances by the descendents of the old families.

To some this may seem how have the mighty fallen: Yes fallen from the world's false estimate of what constitutes aristocracy, but not willing to fall to lower depths a stage of idleness must entail.

They then should now fully realize that though they inherited wealth, position and ease, they put good use to none of them, but forming a most exclusive class, *tolerated* only, those of humble birth, so with the same weapons of their make, are they the targets of their class.

Let them, too, remember society has no use for servants save that of serving, so from the

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rich and haughty whom their ancestors recognized, they will receive no recognition, but rather jeers and taunts because of their lowly occupation. Mind none of these, for if the work be well done, the character intact, the children of such stock will govern once again. Thus keep in mind the real cause of retrogression, namely a wrong conception and value of blood, wealth, or anything else being other than a means, but that work with character makes a strong and vigorous people, and with it a healthy, social integration; whereas idleness, pleasure, luxury and living on a name made by others, brings about an unhealthy social segregation with quick following disintegration of the real thing.

Teach then your wives, your daughters and your sons that merit alone constitutes true nobility, and entitles one alone to true recogni-

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tion among the honest and the great, of any time or age. That one son or daughter of the same family may by his or her actions be making pedigree for those to follow, whereas another may have entirely broken the link which bound him or her to the honorable past, and must therefore at death leave an ignoble record, yes nothing to date from.

Cousin in 1853 wrote a book entitled "The true, the beautiful and the good." This I take to be the summum bonum of the true gentleman and the true lady.

To be such requires not alone grace of manner, but a true conception of the good and the true, and this in itself would exclude the sham of simply relying on the qualities and deeds of your progenitors.

It must be you yourself, yes you must make your own pedigree, and you cannot transmit it

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to your children save in the form of blood, which all animals likewise do, but you as sons of Adam should hand down something more, yes, character, which alone makes the true gentleman, the true lady, the best born and the proper to rule in fine the aristocrat.

To some even now I fear my position will seem untenable, since I have admitted our place was settled by a good and estimable colony, and therefore the decadence, if decadence it be, is nothing more than frail man is everywhere heir to. Admitting this we have tried to show a cause to and for this weakness, which we repeat is in teaching and holding false ideas as to what constitutes the state entitling man or woman to a social standing.

It is, we maintain, in good works, in actions, not in the recital of them; in character, coupled with an even desire for self-improve-

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ment in heart, word and manners; that this desire and attainment does not alone belong to those who are of birth or of the refined professions, is readily seen by a reference to history; for God gives of his own the best type to each of man's classes, and it is only when man tries to trade-mark his special brand as the best because he can date back to a good Earl who he thinks has leavened the whole, is it that we take exception.

As it is, without virtue in the highest and broadest sense of the word as the standard, wealth soon overpowers poverty and education, and in the ruins is found the best struggling for supremacy against the worst: The conflict unequal, the end is foreshadowed by the downfall of those who at one time were the best.

It is not then that we discourage the idea

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of considering of value good ancestors, but rather that we wish to accentuate the proper and true feeling which should guide us in life, so that our worthy ancestors may not look down on us, and as Plato in his dialogue called *Theætetus* says: "When they sing the praises of family, and say that some one is a gentleman because he has had seven generations of wealthy ancestors, he thinks that their sentiments only betray the dullness and narrowness of vision of those who utter them, and who are not educated enough to look at the whole, nor to consider that every man has had thousands and thousands of progenitors, and among them have been rich and poor, kings and slaves, Hellenes and barbarians, many times over. And when some one boasts of a catalogue of twenty-five ancestors, and goes back to Heracles, the son of Amphitryon,

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he cannot understand his poverty of ideas. Why is he unable to calculate that Amphitryon had a twenty-fifth ancestor who might have been anybody, and was such as fortune made him, and he had a fiftieth and so on? He is amused at the notion that he cannot do a sum, and thinks that a little arithmetic would have got rid of his "senseless vanity."

When then to return to our logic, your children ask not about even their fathers or mothers, what they did and what they were, but about some great and good somebody who was very unlike the present father and mother, would it not be well to recall to them the words of that great philosopher, Boetius, who says: "Consider first concerning noble birth. If any one boast of it, how vain and how useless is the boast; for every one knows that all men come from one father and from one mother.

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Or again concerning the people's favor, and concerning their applause, I know not why we rejoice at it. Though they whom the vulgar applaud be illustrious, yet are they more illustrious and more rightly to be applauded who are dignified by virtues. For no man is really the greater or the more praiseworthy for the excellence of another, or for his virtues, if he himself has it not. Are you ever the fairer for another man's beauty? A man is little the better though he have a good father, if he himself is incapable of anything. Therefore I advise that you rejoice in other men's good and their nobility, but so far only that you ascribe it not to yourself as your own; because every man's good and his nobility is more in the mind than in the flesh. This only, indeed, I know of good in nobility: that it shames many a man if he is worse than his ancestors

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were, and he therefore endeavors with all his power to imitate the manners of some one of the best, and his virtues."

Yes under such conditions start all over, and if we have so many gaps in our fences of lineage, declare at once, we all originally had the same beginning, and only through our honest and true endeavor shall we be able to attain a healthy body, mind and soul; or expect to make a social standing, which agreed to here, will extend our sphere of usefulness, make us more happy, less egotistic, less selfish, more humble, and more in accord with the sublime teachings of Christ.

Giving thus true Christian men and women the highest type of gentleman and lady, instead of the false article as now seen among the rich and the poor, who aping society with her mistaken value placed on blood or wealth,

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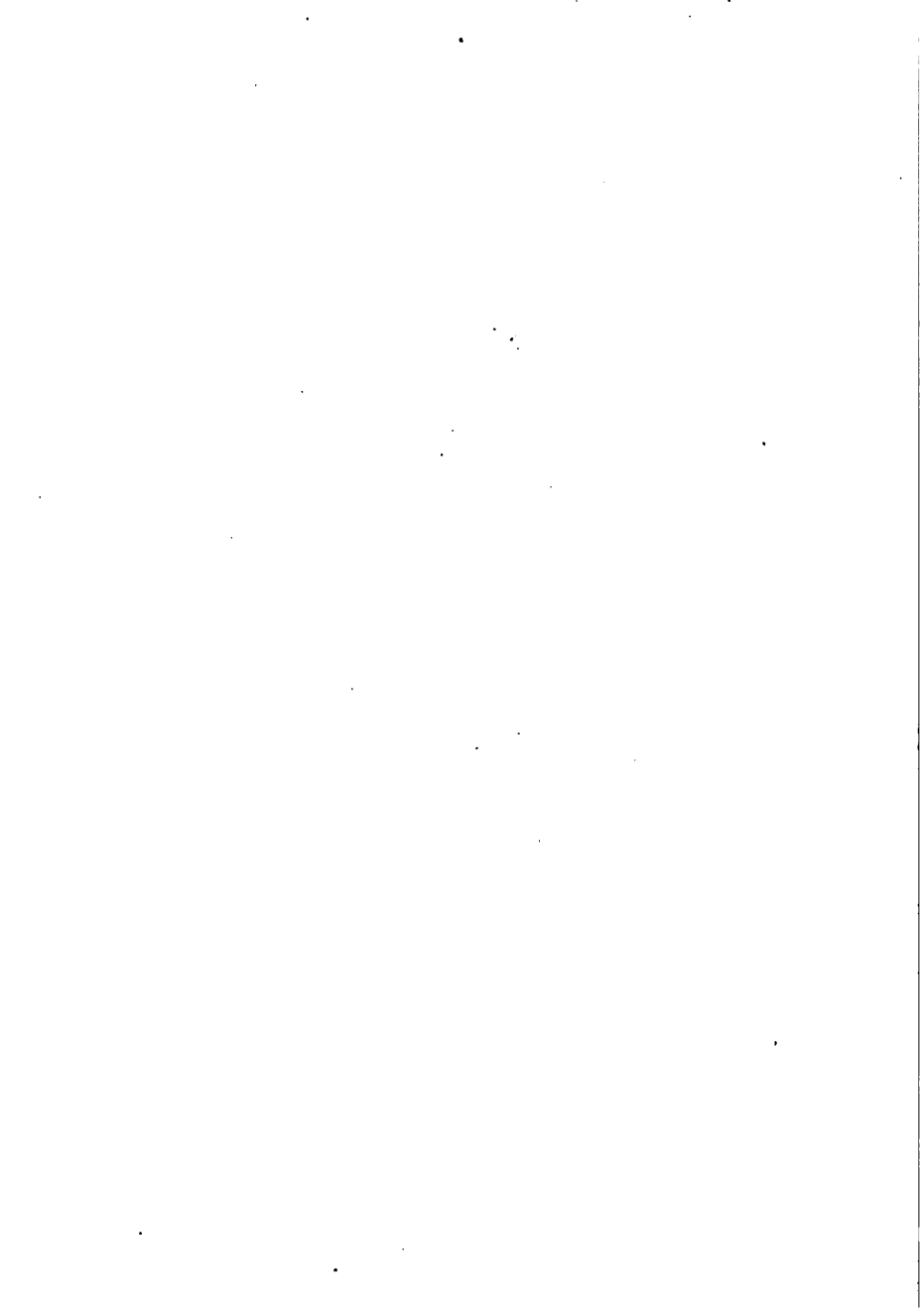
and a recognition of these uncoupled from character, will one day have the same ending, degeneracy or extinguishment.

Yes I say extinguishment, for I firmly believe the laws which govern nature in the propagation of the species as outlined by Darwin, pertains equally to man when in the collective form of society; and since nature teaches through her profuseness of her species, and the wholesale slaughter of most of them, that there is an underlying law which as Spencer expresses it, only allows the continuance of the best, under, as he terms it, "the survival of the fittest." So do we think the same law is to be seen in society as constituted by man, when getting, as he regards it, to the top, his descendants discard the hard work and character which brought them there, and substitute in their place living on the name.

STOP AND THINK

He soon goes down, and will find as we have tried to show has been the case with the place we are writing about, that his birth-right is lost, his heritage cancelled, and strangers come in, control and inhabit the land.





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